Cultural Heritage of Mithilā

Radhakrishna Chaudhary

I

Mithilā, the land of hoary antiquity, is one of the earliest centres of civilisation in the east, particularly in the field of Vedic culture. Even priore to its āryanisation, it had its oun history about which we have hardly any plausibe source of information but a critical anthropological and ethnological review of the geographical limits of this ancient land reveals to us a picture worthy of examination. The recent excavations at Chirand have proved, beyond any shadow of doubt, that north Bihar had achieved great cultural heights in the pre-historic period and it had a place of pride among the various cultural centres in the neolithic phase. Even before the emeregence of the Aryans on the scene, Mithilā had wide contacts and it seems that the Kirātas and a number of other tribes had extended their sway over the northern part of Videha.

Rome was not built in a day so goes the adage and in that very sense we can say that the Mithilā of Janaka was not a sudden phenomenon in the history of eastern India rather it took centuries to build a pattern of culture out of which emerged the facets of cultural life in a varied colour. The Janaka period of Videha's history presupposes a long cultural continuity and tradition and in the absence of any archaeological evidence we can simply surmise or conjecture that Videha had developed as an important centre of trade and cultural link since time immemorial. The geographical setting had given it a peculiar place and naturally the development of a varied culture in this area had a lasting import on Indian culture as a whole.

The intermingling of different races and culture gave rise to a certain composite type with more or less common characteristics. The northen and north-eastern part of India had some earliest contacts with the Austro-

Dravidian elements. According to S.K. Chatterji, "the earliest types of cultural assimilation went hand in hand with a large amount of racial fusion— and some of the fundamental things in Brahmanical Hinduism like the worships of Śiva and Umā, of Viṣṇu and Śrī and the yoga philosophy and practice came from the Dravidian speakers."[1] Parts of north Bihar had been associated with the Kirāta culture, that is, the non-aryan culture. In our estimate of the cultural heritage of Mithilā, we have to take into account the earliest references to the Kirātas, believed to have been the non-aryan tribes presiding over the destiny of the Tarai region of Videha prior to its aryanisation. The Kirātas are mentioned in the Vedic literature, *Mahābhārata* (standing at the confluence of the cultural synthesis through the ages) and other contemporary literature. A Kirāta is mentioned in connection with the *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice[2] and in the *Atharvaveda*,[3] a kirāta is associated with the mountain. Mance[4] regards the Kirāta as a degraded Kṣatriya. Mahādeva is assoceated with the Kirātas in the *Mahābhārata* and Bhima meets the Kirātas in the east of Videha. He is credited with having defeated seven of the Kirāta rulers. There is already a *Kirātaparva* section in the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, where the Kirātas are described as of yellow colour and even lord Śiva is said to have once taken the form of a Kirāta.

The Kirātas are associated with the foreign peoples like the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Pahlavas and the Chinese in the *Mahābhārata* and also by Sylvain Levy. Their golden colour is also attested to in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and they are described as ferocious and raw fish eaters. In the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the Kirātas are placed in the east. Here we are not in a position to assess critically the origin and development of the Kirāta culture in India in the present state of over knowledge but the picture that emerges from of our study of the ancient texts suggests that they contibuted a good deal to the development

1 S. K. Chatterji—*Kirātajanakirti* (Calcutta, 1950), p. 151; Cf. Kaster Rosnow, "*Kirāta*" in *Le Monde Oriental*, vol. XXX (1936—Upassala), pp. 60-169 quoted in Chatterji's work; Cf. R. K. Chaudhary—*Vrātyas in Ancient India* (1964).
2 *Vaj. Saṁhita*—XXX, 16; *Taitt. Brāhm.*—III, 4, 12, 1); *Sabhāparva*–26-32.
3 *AV.*—X, 4, 14.
4 Manu—X, 44.

of a composite culture in the Videha region in the earliest period. The precise features of the pre-Vedic cults are difficult to determine. Some distinctive forms of the non-aryans were added to the Vedic pantheons. The Kirātas lived on the Himalayan slopes and in the mountains of the east. Since we find their mention in the Vedic literature, we may conclude that by that time they had mingled with the aryans and had influenced their culture to a great extent. So far as Videha is concerned, they were undoubtedly the most prominent actors on the scene and fore-runners of trade and culture between China and north-eastern India through Nepal. They were also the carriers of culture on both sides of the Himalaya.

According to the Purāṇic tradition, the city of Mithilā was founded and named after the region had been colonised by the followers of Videgha Māṭhava. According to Monier-Williams, Videha indicated the whole country and Mithilā applied to the capital city but ultimately Mithilā replaced Videha as name of that territory. The old names like Videha, Mithilā and Tīrabhukti have persisted to this day. We have a list of twelve names in the *Mithilākhaṇḍa* of the *Bṛhadviṣṇupurāṇa*.[5] Mithilā appears to have been excluded from the four ancient sacred divisions of the country *viz*., Brahmāvarta, Brahmarṣideśa, Madhyadeśa, and Āryāvarta. Mithilā acquired sanctity from the fact that there roamed about a black antelope in this regions.[6] Mithilā was considered an important part of the Prāchyadeśa. Prāchī in the ancient Tibetan geography included Mithilā and Aṅga.[7] Jalodhava of the

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5 मिथिला, तैरभुक्तिश्च, वैदेही, नैमिकाननम् ।
ज्ञानक्षेत्रं कृपापीठं, स्वर्णलाङ्गल पद्धतिः ॥
जानकी जन्मभूमिश्च, निरपेक्षा विकल्मषा ।
रामानन्दकुटी, विश्वभावनी, नित्यमङ्गला ।
इतिद्वादश नामानि मिथिलायाः ॥

6 P. V. Kane—*History of Dharmaśāstra*—II (1), p. 14 ff. We learn from a verse in the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* that the path of duty was revealed by the sage of Mithilā (Yājñavalkya) in that country in which the black antelope roams about.

7 *IC*—vol. VII, 2; Grierson (edited) *LSI*—V(II), p. 4; *Gītanīdyakathā* of the *Puruṣaparīkṣā* of Vidyāpati—[illegible].

Mahābhārata is identified with Mithilā. The province of Tīrabhukti included Videha, Mithilā and Vaiśālī.

On account of the geographical factors and the existence of a large number of rivers and rivulets, all weather communications are open only for a few months even today in a major part of Mithilā. Besides these geo-political factors, extraordinary devotism to traditional learning has been responsible for the orthodoxy and conservatism of the Maithilas in day to day life. This has made them static for a long time. They guarded their teachings with extreme jealousy and this was responsible for the growth of institutions like *Śarayantra* and *Śalākāparīkṣā*.[8]

II

Mithilā made a notable contribution to the development of Upaniṣadic ideas and philosophy.[9] The Maithilas made a radical departure from the accepted notions of the Vedic rituals and paved the way for the Jainas and the Buddhists in emphasising on austerities. Videha, the centre of Upaniṣadic culture, played an important part in the development of this aspect of rationalism. The traditional notion about the infallibity of the Vedas did not find favour with the thinkers of the *Upaniṣadas*. We have in the *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* (1.2.7) the following assertion—"But frail, in truth, are those boats, the sacrifices......Fools who praise this as the highest good are subject again and again to old age and death."

Yājñavalkya told Gārgī—"Whatever, O Gārgī, without knowing that imperishable (*akṣara*) offers oblations in the world, sacrifices and penance for a thousand years, his work will have an end. Whosoever, O Gārgī, without knowing this imperishable departs this world, he is miserable (like a slave). Be he, O Gārgī, who departs this world, knowing this imperishable, he is '*Brahman*'—(*Bṛh Upaniṣad-III. 8.*10)".

8 *MMC.* II; *PAIOC*—XII, pp. 310-325.

9 *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*—1.1.5—"The lower knowledge is the *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*......but the higher knowledge is that by which the indestructible is apprehended (*Brahman*)."

By doing away with the orthodox Vedic tradition of *Yajña* and *Tapas*, Videha took the lead in emphasising the other means of salvation, *that is*, the knowledge of the absolute. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* has rightly pointed out that "the Maithilas are adept in the true knowledge of the self...... they are true to the philosophical ideals of being beyond good and evil in their own homes." The *Upaniṣadas* constitute the highest level of intellectual attainments and mark the cultural attainments of a very high order in Mithilā.

There are conflicting evidences about Janaka-Yājñavalkya relationship. Janaka, Gārgī and Ārtabhāga are described as pupils of Yājñavalkya. It has to be borne in mind that formal pupilage was not necessary in the early period. Maitreyī (Yājñavalkya's wife), Ārtabhāga and Gārgī were not exactly pupils of Yājñavalkya in the strictest sense of the term. In those days of intelletual curiosity, distinguished scholars were encouraged to become regular teachers. We know that Janaka Videha met some wandering Brāhmaṇas like Śvetaketu Āruṇeya, Somaśusma, Satyayajña, Yājñavalkya etc., whom he asked about the offering of the *Agnihotra* oblation. Though Yājñavalkya, in his own way, gave satisfactory answer yet it contained some flaws which were pointed out by Janaka who himself explained to him the offering of *Agnihotra*. He, then, put questions to Yājñavalkya and thence forward he became a *Brāhmaṇa* or *Brahmaniṣṭha*, having the knowledge of *Brahma*. Janaka taught Yājñavalkya, Pratardana and others[10] and thereby established the supremacy of the Kṣatriyas in the realm of knowledge and philosophy.

Through a long line of Janakas, Mithilā became an important seat of culture in the whole of Prāchyadeśa. For the attainment of the true knowledge of *Brahman*, the Janakas had consulted teachers like Barku, Jitvan, Śākalya Udaṅka, Gardhavipīta, and various others. From the point of view of eminence, they were matchless in their own field. From different sources we learn that Ārtabhāga, Bhujya Lāhyayana, Uśasta Chākrāyaṇa Kahoḍa Kauśitakeya, Uddālaka, Āruṇi, Aśvala, Jāratakārava, and mainy

10 *Chānd. Upn.*—IV. 2.3; VII; *Pañch. Brh.*—XII. 12.6; Also cf.—*Śat. Brh.*—XI., 6, 2, 1.

other thinkers of the age graced the court of Janaka[11] whose generosity was a constant source of disappointment to Ajātaśatru of Kāśī. Janaka justified title of Videha by offering his entire kingdom to Yājñavalkya. It was Janaka who laid stress on knowledge and opposed sacrifices and rituals. The rigid form of religious sacrifices evoked a great protest even among the followers of Brāhmaṇism and that led to a revolt against "formalism and exclusiveness against the Brāhmanical system."[12] Janaka Videha even refused to submit to the hierarchical pretensions of the Brāhmaṇas and asserted his right of performing sacrifices without the intervention of priests. This assertion of Janaka heralded a glorious chapter in the annals of Mithilā and in this respect her contribution to the development of a distinct Maithila culture, as distinct and different from the Kuru-Panchal culture of the west, is really outstanding. Janaka's stoical nature is fully borne out by his famous saying—"...in this blaizng city of Mithilā, nothing of mine is burning." According to A. L. Basham, at the root of the growth of asceticism "lay not only a dissatisfaction with the sacrificial cult but a clear psychological uneasiness which was caused by the feeling of insecurity due to the break up of the tribal units which had so far given the people a sense of solidarity."

Yājñavalkya means one who promulgates sacrifices.[13] He had two wives, *viz*. Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī and a son named Naciketā by the latter. He held liberal views and advocated the eating of tender cows and oxen.[14] He is called *yogīśvara* and it has been held that the "doctrines promulgated by Yājñavalkya in the *Bṛh. Upaniṣad* are in fact completely Buddhistic."[15] By the time of the Upaniṣadas, we come across a good number of wandering teachers, *viz*., Gautama, Kapila, Bibhāṇḍaka, Satānanda, Ṛṣiśṛṅga, Vedavatī, etc., who had begun to expound new ideas on everything including Vedic rituals and sacrifices. The rigidness and complexities of the earlier period had by

11 *Śat. Brh.*—XIV. 6, 1-4; *Bṛh. Upn.*—III. 5.

12 *CHI*, vol. 1, p. 63; It should be noted here that the Upaniṣadas laid stress on knowledge as the means of Salvation.

13 Pāṇini—IV. 2. 104 ([illegible]), Cf. *Śat Brh.* XIV. 6.1.1. *Taitt. Brh.* III. 11.8.14.

14 *Śat. Brh.*—III. 1.2.21.

15 Upendra Thakur—*History of Mithila*, p. 105.

then slackened and the *Jātakas* show that the priestly class had lost its authorities.[16] In his teachings to Maitreyī, Yājñavalkya has enunciated the principles of *Advaita*.

The precise nature of the non-Vedic worship is not exactly known. Mahādeva (Śiva) was certainly a non-Vedic deity and the presence of the bow of Śiva in the palace of Mithilā from the time of king Devavrata to that of Janaka is not quite accidental. It suggests that once upon a time Janaka's ancestors (the original occupants of the land) were Śiva worshipper or had accepted Śiva worship which was then current in the area as the prominent pre-Vedic religious cult. It was in fact an ancient local cult which the *Rāmāyaṇa* mentions as *Dhanurmahāyajña*. It has been held that Rāma's breaking of Śiva's bow and his victory over Paraśurāma succeeded in ousting non-Vedic Śaivism[17] which had been popular in Mithilā for a long time. This view however seems erroneous as the following discussion would show.

When the Janaka dynasty began to rule, the Kirātas were holding sway over a major part of Videha. The Janakas respected the old cultural beliefs and practices of his conquered subjects including the Kirātas who were Śaivas. As we have seen above, the Janakas were not orthodox followers of the Vedic customs rather they had brought about radical changes therein. The political expediency might have demanded a change not only in religious and philosophical outlook but also in cultural field and by adopting the existing customs of the vanquished Kirātas, the Janakas might have paved the way for cultural assimilation. In view of these facts, we may categorically state that Śiva had come to be recognised as the most powerful deity by the time Rāma had emerged on the scene and the fusion between the aryan and non-aryan religious concepts had consummated. It must be asserted that the breaking of Śiva's bow did not mark the ousting of the non-Vedic Śaivism rather it marked the beginning of a further step in the process of cultural assimilation which began with the dawn of civilisation. Rāma, himself, worshipped Śiva before embarking on his expedition against Rāvaṇa.

16 *CHI*.—vol. I, p. 221.
17 *JBRS*, vol. XLVIII, Pts. i-iv.

King Janaka brought radical changes in the realm of philosophical thought of the age. He made a sharp break with the past on ideological plane, and was a symbol of *Jīvanamukti*, completely unattached like the lotus leaf, and was regarded as an emblem of perfect wisdom. He represented a synthesis of *Jñāna, Karma, Sannyāsa* and *Gārhasthya* as is evident from the *Devībhāgavata* and *Śrīmadbhāgavata*. Yājñavalkya, in course of his instruction to his wife, declared : "It is the self for whose sake everything else in the world is dear to all—that self ought to be seen, heard of, contemplated and realised." The emphasis on the introspective self-analysis formed the basis of philosophy in Mithilā and the detachment from worldly objects became a prominent feature of Maithila character as is exemplified by the life of one of the most illustrious sons of Mithilā—Mm. Bhavanātha Mishra, 'Ayāchī'. The concept of *Jīvanamukta* has since been inspiring the life of the eminent Maithilas. In Maithila homes for generations, two seemingly contradictory environments seem to have prevailed simutaneously—the scholar husband dedicated to the pursuit of metaphysical knowledge and the gay and lively maidens singing uninhibited songs, painting on the walls of *Kohabara* and decking themselves out in attractive make-up and clothes. The story of Vācaspati and Bhāmatī quite current even today in Mithilā as the ideal husband and wife. The comparison of lotus leaf with the concept of *Jīvanamukti* is a point to reckon with in so far as Mithilā is concerned. Lotus came to be an integral part of Maithila culture as is evident from the writings of Vidyāpati.[18] He expressed both the lust for life and the spirit of denial and devotion. He also treated lotus as of special significance in the study of Maithila Culture.[19]

18 R. K. Chaudhary, '*Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati*' (Varanasi, 1976).
[illegible] (राधाकृष्ण चौधरी कलकत्ता-1969) for an enunciation of the concept of Lotus.

19 (i) [illegible]
(ii) [illegible]
(iii) [illegible]
(iv) [illegible]
(v) [illegible]
(vi) [illegible]
(vii) [illegible]
(viii) [illegible]

III

Keeping with the tradition of Janaka and Yājñavalkya, Mithilā's contribution to the realm of philosophy, *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṁsā* is unique. The rise of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, as forming part of one discipline, presupposes a long previous development of philosophical thought. *Vaiśeṣika* and *Nyāya* form a closely connected pair. The Vaiśeṣika system aimed at attaining a comprehensive philosophical view whereas *Nyāya* constituted a detailed and acute exposition of formal logic. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system is satisfied with pointing out the means of salvation and consisting in correct knowledge. This system admits of nothing invisible or transcendent (*avyakta*). The system did not originally accept the existence of god and expounded the theory that salvation depended on a correct knowledge of things. Later on, with the rise of *Navya-Nyāya* (amalgam of *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*), the system became theistic in nature as is evident from Udayana's *Kusumāñjali*. This became necessary because Mithilā protected orthodox culture from the onslaughts of all heterodox schools of thought. Vātsyāyana wrote his *Bhāṣya* on *Nyāyasūtra*. Udyotakara wrote his *Vārttika* on *Bhāṣya* and Vācaspati not only elaborated the concept of *Vārttika*, but also defended it against the Buddhist attack. He was the master of all the six systems of Indian philosophy and laid the foundation of the Mithilā school of philosophy which inspired later writers to refuting the Buddhist logic. Saṁkara had given a crushing defeat to the heterodox schools of thought both on ideological and metaphysical plain and succeeded in reviving Hinduism on a sound basis.

In Mithilā, trinitarianism now formed the basis of Hinduism. It consisted of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa and in the course of time Brahmā came to be relegated to the background. Gradually, the harmonising effect of this trinitarianism was seen in the growth of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism. Though Śaṁkara fought the battle on ideological plane, it was left to Vācaspati to put it on a more secure philosophical basis against the attacks of Buddhism. Udayana defended the case against the Buddhists and succeeded in refuting not only their no-soul theory but also in ably expounding the principles of Theism. Long before the problem of Induction in Logic attracted the attention of western logicians, Gaṅgeśa (founder of *Navya-Nyāya*) shifted

his emphasis from Ontology to Epistemology and the system continued to be cultivated by scholars like Vardhamāna, Pakṣadhara, Vāsudeva, Śaṁkara Miśra,[20] Vācaspati (II) and others. Even Lakhimā is said to have written a treatise on *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* entitled *Padārtha-Chandra*.

In the field of *Mīmāṁsā*, Mithilā's contribution is unique. The credit for its rejuvenation goes to Kumārila Bhaṭṭa who re-established the supremacy of *Karmakāṇḍa* by vigorously defending it against the Buddhists. Maṇḍana Miśra of Mahisi (Saharsa) was not only the *bhaginipati* of Kumārila but also his disciple. Maṇḍana was a great supporter of Vedic *Karmakāṇḍa*. His wife, Bhārati, presided over the intellectual debate between him and Śaṁkara and thereby made her mark as a scholar of eminence by ruling in favour of the monistic Vedānta of Śaṁkara. Prabhākara, a classmate of Maṇḍana, made a marked departure from the position held by Kumārila and a third school of *Mīmāṁsā* was started by Murāri.

Kumārila was the founder of the *Bhaṭṭamata*. He propounded that *mīmāṁsā* was based upon the Vedas, upon ordinary experience and also upon direct perception and inference based upon these. It has been reared up by an unbroken line of scientific teachers.[21] Various commentaries on the works of Kumārila (viz. *Tantravārtika*, *Tupṭīkā* and *Ślokavārtika*) have been written by a number of scholars. Maṇḍana carried the point further in his *Naiṣkarmasiddhi*. He was the propagator of Kumārila's views and in doing so he wrote a commentary on *Tantravārtika*. In his *Vidhi-Viveka*, Maṇḍana refutes the *Bhaṭṭa* and the *Gurumata* and in his *Sphoṭasiddhi* he has criticised the views of his *Guru*. As a great Vedantist, he wrote *Brahmasiddhi*, a masterpiece in the history of Vedānta philosophy. Prabhākara was the founder of *Gurumata* and the *Bṛhati* forms the basis of his school. Murāri Miśra was the founder of *Miśramata*. He held independent views on the theory of the validity of knowledge. The *Mīmāṁsakas* support *Svataḥprāmāṇya* (self-validity) and the *Naiyāyikas* support *Parataḥ prāmāṇya*. Prabhākara supports the former. Kumārila somewhat differs from him and Murāri suggests new theory nearer to the *Nyāya* system.

20 R. K. Chaudhary—'*Mithila in the Age of Vidyāpati*' for details.

21 Gaṅgānātha Jha—*Pūrvamīmāṁsā in its Sources*—Cf. S. N. Dasgupta—*History of Indian Philosophy*-II. 87-98.

In the long list of thinkers, Vācaspati stands out pre-eminent. His matchless work *Bhāmatī* (possibly named after his wife) refers to the Buddhist doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda* and gives a fitting reply to it. It has been rightly observed that "every system of Indian philosophy owes a deep debt to Vācaspati."[22]

IV

From the religious point of view, Mithilā has been the centre of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism and various other cults since time immemorial. It has to be stressed in the beginning that high philosophical discussions and the subtleties of religious thinking were the pastimes of the rulers, princes and courtiers and the common man had neither the leisure nor the required intellectual attainment to indulge in such luxuries. Abstract theories had no meaning for them since they were involved in their day today struggle for existence. The '*dissent*' as revealed in the *Upaniṣadas* might have worked as seeds for the heretics of the future—say of the sixth century B.C. Voices of protest are seen in the *Upaniṣadas* and Mithilā played no mean part in it. The ruling nobility refused to submit to the Brāhmaṇa and insisted on the primacy of knowledge of *Brahman* and *Ātman*. The rise of Jainism and Buddhism gave a further jolt. The wide impact of these two religious systems is a lasting contribution and a priceless heritage of Mithilā. The two systems rose as a reaction against Brāhmanical rituals and may be termed as a Kṣatriya protest against Brāhmaṇism—a pace already set earlier by king Janaka. These two heretical systems rejected Veda's claim to infallibility and the caste-system as well. Vaiśālī used to be a stronghold of Jainism while being looked upon by the Buddhists as a seminary of heresies and dissent.

All the divergent religious systems and sects flourished side by side in Mithilā. Buddhism created a new sense of reality and left its indelible mark on the cultural heritage of north Bihar. The idea of revolt in the *Upaniṣads* germinated through centuries and burst forth in a new form in Buddhism

22 Upendra Thakur—*Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithilā*, p. 69. Cf. S. N. Dasgupta—op. cit., I. 418; R. K. Chaudhary—*The University of Vikramaśilā*.

which marked a leap forward in the realm of speculative thought signifying the ethics of a new religion. The Buddhist upsurge afflicted the people of Mithilā and its impact on the life of the people of this region can be seen even today in the field of Tantric religion and thought.

The main aim of the Tantras was the sublimation through rationale and symbolism. The sixty four *Tantras* are divided into three main groups and they relate to the technique of worship, psychic subjects and occult phenomenon. Tantricism came to be treated as a system of thought and action with certain philosophical background. Tantric rituals came to be analysed philosophically. Tantric *sādhanā* was pratised at various centres. The Tantric rituals laid stress on five elements known as *Pañchamakāras*, *viz.* *madya* (wine), *māṁsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudrā* (parched grain), and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). *Chakrapūjā* is confined to the *Vāmāchāri* tantrikas. It consists of a mass of promiscuous gathering of the votaries of both sexes at midnight round a cirle or *Chakra*.

Tantra was widely practised in Mithilā when Rāmasiṁhadeva of the Karṇāta dynasty was ruling. The Tibetan traveller, Dharmasvāmī, bears witness to it. Rāmasiṁha, though a Hindu, had offered the post of royal chaplain to Buddhist Dharmasvāmī, who, on various grounds, refused the offer with thanks. He saw the charms and miracles of Mithilā tantrics at his court. Narasiṁha Thakur was the author of a Tantric work entitled *Tārābhaktisudhārṇava*. He has enumerated various types of wowen required for the purpose, *viz.*—*Naṭīs* (actress), *Kāpālikas* (nuns wearing necklaces of skulls), *Veśyās* (prostitutes), *Dhobinas* (washerwomen), *nāpita* (barber), *Brāhmaṇī*, *Śūdra*, *Gowār*, *Mālini* (gardener) etc. He has further given details about the *Cittasādhanā*. These practices have been disowned by the *Dakṣiṇāchāris*. Most of the Maithila Tantric *Sādhakas* were followers of *Dakṣiṇamārga*, based on pure yogic practices as opposed to the *Vāmamārga*. The above mentioned work of Narasiṁha Thakur deals with the worship of various forms of *Śakti* including *Tārā*. The *Kālibhaktisudhārṇava* of the same author (being chapter xi of the above mentioned work and as preserved in the Mithilā Institute, Darbhanga) deals with the daily worship of Kālī. Both *Kālī* and *Tārā* are believed to be identical. Narasiṁha Thakur has quoted

from two hundred and sixty authors. Vidyāpati is also credited with having compiled a tantric work "*Āgamādvaitanirṇaya.*" Famous tantric works like *Śāradātilaka* (a commentary on *Tantrapradīpa*), *Sādhaka-maṇḍana* (by Chūḍāmaṇi) and *Bhawānī-bhaktimodikā* etc. were written and compiled. These works belong to the *Vāmamārga*. It has been held that the *Tantras* are meant for the Kali age and for the low class people.

The impact of Tantricism on Maithila society is so great that no aspect of daily life is free from it. Even the Maithila script and headgear are believed to have originated out of Tantric influence. It would not be out of place to give an introduction of the famous Maithila Tantric named Ghanānanda Das. He was a *Siddha* Tantric known all over India and a south Indian Tantric came to seek his advice on certain technical matters and returned satisfied. His contribution in the field of *Tantra* was unique and he was a well known man in his time as we know that southerner had heard his name in the Vindhya mountain region. His writings are yet to be studied on scientific lines. His two known important works are :—(i) *Mātaṅga Kusumāñjali* and (ii) *Mantrakalpadruma*. Ghanānanda[23] was the son of Umānātha Vaiyākaraṇa. Mithilā is full of Tantric centres even today and during the *Navarātri* festival, these centres attract large gatherings. *Mahāchinatārā, Manasā, Tārā, Chinnamastā, Mahiṣāsuramardini* etc. were borrowed from the later Buddhist tantric pantheon and absorbed in Maithila tradition. The Khadirvani Tārā at Mahisi is even today worshipped as Ugratārā. It is regarded as one of the important Tantric centres of Mithilā, other important centres being Uchaiṭha, Kātyāyani-asthāna, Jagmangalagarh and others. Mithilā left its mark on tantra philosophy and literature and came to be regarded as one of the important tantric centres of India. The *Mantra Kaumudi* (edited by Ramānātha Jhā and published by the Mithila Institute, Darbhanga) and the *Tantra Kaumudi* of Devanatha Thakura deal with the details of Tantra worship.

From the time of Umāpati (c. 14th century A.D.) down to Harṣanātha, Vaiṣṇavism found favour in Mithilā. The famous saint, Viṣṇupurī, was one of

2) B. B. Varma—*Maithila Karaṇa Kāyasthaka Pañjī ka Sarvekṣaṇa* (1973), pp. 130-131. Cf. *Parichaya-Pīta*—published by Bombay Karaṇagoṣṭhī 1969–article by Narendranātha Dāsa.

the greatest Vaiṣṇava thinkers of Mithilā. Poet and writers have in one way or other paid obeisance to Viṣṇu and they have shown affection to Vaiṣṇava deities. Feelings towards Vaiṣṇavism in Mithilā were quite sympathetic. It is one thing to be a *Pañchadevopāsaka* and another to have a sympathetic attitude towards Vaiṣṇavism. Subhadra Jha has rightly controverted the idea of *Pañchadevopāsanā* in Vidyāpati[24]. *Hari, Viṣṇu,* fish and tortoise incarnations of Viṣṇu are mentioned by Chaṇḍeśvara. That the Maithilas followed the Vaiṣṇava tenets right from the beginning of the Karṇāṭa dynasty is evident from the *Andhrāthārhi inscription* of Śrīdharadāsa from which we learn that he erected a temple in honour of Viṣṇu.[25] Dates for Viṣṇu worship are fixed and prescribed in the writings of the Maithila *Nibandhakāras*. Govindadatta (*Govindamānasollāsa*), Bhairavasiṁha, Viṣṇupurī (*Bhaktiratnāvali*) and Devanātha and others have composed valuable works on Vaiṣṇavism. Viṣṇupurī was an Advaita Vedāntist. Vidyāpati's lyrics are, no doubt, devotional and according to Subhadra Jha, "none of the poems in the Nepal MSS in which Mādhava refers decidedly to the divine being, the name of any other patrons of the poet occur." The famous Maithila poet, Govindadāsa, has paid glowing tributes to Vidyāpati for his contribution to Vaiṣṇavism.

V

Since the days of Yājñavalkya, Mithilā has been the centre of Smṛtic Studies. These *Smṛitis* give us a picture of contemporary society and various social problems. The Maithila *Smṛiti* writers aimed at harmonisation of, and reconciliation between various sects. They widened the horizon of *Dharmapramāṇa* and some extra Vedic texts were brought into the fold of *Smṛti*.[26] In this respect Śrīdatta, Chaṇḍeśwara and Vidyāpati left behind their counter parts in Bengal and Orissa (Śūlapāṇi, Vidyākara and Narasiṁha respectively). But they failed to give lead in suggesting social reforms. The Bengal reformer

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24 S. Jha—*The Songs of Vidyāpati-Introduction*, p. 65. Cf. *Mithila in the age of Vidyāpati*-Section on Vidyāpati's Faith—*JBORS*, vol. III, pp. 9-10; *Kṛtyaratnākara*, verse 1-2.

25 R. K. Chaudhary—*Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, p. 124.

26 *Our Heritage* (Calcutta)—X, pts. 1 & 2.

Raghunandana suggested *Prāyaśchita* but the Maithila smṛti writers kept silent and took a negative attitude as we find in Vācaspati's *Kṛtyachintāmaṇi* where he advises us not to learn *Mlechcha's* language (that is, Persian) as if that would solve all the problems.

The smṛti writers of Mithilā revolved round the feudal nobles, (some of them were themselves great feudal lords), who having been ousted from political power and being brāhmaṇas themselves, engaged in writing these works. Even though great socio-economic and political changes in and around Mithilā were taking place, smṛti writers of Mithilā did not change their ideas about age-old *Varṇāśramadharma.* They wrote everything for the brāhmaṇas and treated śudras as non-entities though they constituted the majority. The śudras had no right to hold the office of a *Prādvivāka.* These *Nibandhas* were compiled mainly for the rulers and nobles. They were driven far from the realities and actualities of life. They are found waxing eloquent over the merits of costly *Dānas* (gifts). It is only Vidyāpati who has recommended the less costly gift of *Masoora.* Among the conscious *smṛti* writers, Vardhamāna deserves special mention because he cautions the society against unscrupulous persons, masquerading as honest, like traders, druggists, physicians, arbitrators, witnesses, Mantrikas, Tantrikas etc. and call them *Prakala Taskara*[27].

VI

In its description of Mithilā, the *Mahājanaka Jātaka* (no. 539) speaks of all round artistic development. In the realm of fine arts Mithilā made a remarkable contribution in respect of music and painting. Even today Mithilā has special songs for each and every occasion. Mithilā has special regards for her typical modulation and tunes. The Mithilā School of Music has been able to maintain its pristine purity because of the unique contribution made by her women folk.

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27 Cf. *Indian Society : Historical Probings*—My article on Mithilā in that volume. Here it should be noted that the study of the *Smṛtis* and *Nibandha* was encouraged by the State as it served their class interest.

Mithilā has a special melody of her own. *Nachāri, Yoga, Uchiti, Samadaun, Tirhuta Malāra, Kohabara, Vaṭagamni, Marsiya* etc. are some of the typical Maithili songs having internal appeal.

The *Varṇaratnākara* of Jyotirīśvara mentions seven kinds of defects of singers and fourteen kinds of *Gītadoṣa*. Śivasiṁha was a great lover and patron of music and he employed Jayanta to attune the songs of Vidyāpati. Vidyāpati's lyrics added beauty and created a new record in matters of musical development of Mithilā in all its aspects. Various authors like Simhabhūpāla (author of the famous work, *Saṁgītaratnākaravyākhyā*), Jagaddhara (author of *Saṁgītasarvasva*), Ghanasyāma (author of *Śrīhastamuktāvali*), Maheśa Thakur and others have written standard works on music. Mithilā had its own *rāgas* and *rāginīs* as is known to us from Lochana's *Rāgataraṅgiṇī*.[28]

In the field of painting, Mithilā has made a unique contribution and the modern world has developed a craze for Mithilā paintings. When and how this special type of painting came into existence, we can not definitely say but this much is certain that this art is of a very antique origin and it had its beginning in the Purāṇic culture. Its connection with Tantric form of worship is indicative of its antiquity. Mithilā's religious beliefs and institutions have been kept alive through the medium of this pictorial folk art. Every specific painting has a tale to tell. Its importance can be well realised from the fact that only recently a German art connossieur came to Madhubani and visited art centres to study the implication and meaning of the Mithilā painting.

Though Mithilā is considered to be earliest aryan centre in the whole of eastern India, the people of Mithilā have remained devoted worshippers of of Śiva and Śakti (in all her forms). Social functions of all denominations in Mithilā are preceded by a type of painting known as *Aripana* (Alpanā in Bengal). No social function in Mithilā, even the lowliest one, can be thought

28 "ललिता विभासी वसन्तु भैरव्य हिराणि वराडी च ।
गोपीवल्लभ शुभटी रामकली धाविश्रारडी ॥
कौशिक कोदारास्वी वसन्तो पन्चमी तथा ।
असावरी च श्री रागो गौडमालवा मालवो ॥
भूपाली राज विजय नाटाः कामोद देशाखी ।
केदारोऽत्र मल्लरी रागेते मैथिलः कारमाः ॥"

of without the *aripana* painting. The type of *aripana* differs from function to function. *Aripana* is sketched on earth, wooden plank, place of worship, paper and is done for all occasions (from birth to death). Seven round *aripanas* are made in *Kohabara* in which fish, bamboo, pond etc. are depicted in paintings for marriage, *chaturthi*, *dwirāgmana*, *muṇḍana-upanayana* etc. *Malwaka* is a prominent painting for the wedding of girls. The popular types of paintings or *aripanas* and others are as follows :—

(i) *Kohabara*
(ii) *Malwaka*
(iii) *Aripana* of nine planets of the occasion of *chaturthi*
(iv) *Kosva*—on the occasion of *Dwirāgamana*
(v) *Purainipāta*—on the occasion of *Muṇḍana*
(vi) *Kobrā*—in Śrāvaṇa on the occasion of *Madhuśrāvaṇī*
(vii) Sun and moon on the occasion of *Gaṇeśachautha*
(viii) *Kakwā*—on the occasion of *Saṁkrānti* in Āświna
(ix) *Durgā*—on the *Navamī* day in Dashera
(x) *Chausanikha*—on the occasion of *Devothāna Ekādaśī*
(xi) *Paṭawā*—on the occasion of the *Bhātṛi-dwitīyā* day
(xii) *Kelāthamha*—on the occasion of the *Dīpāwalī* day (also known as *Sukharātrika Aripana*)
(xiii) *Chan-Suraj*—on the occasion of *Navānna* in *Agrahana*
(xiv) *Hāra-Harwā*—on the occasion of *Viswatpanchami* (depicting a pair of bullock, a plough and farmer)
(xv) *Aṣṭadala*—for religious occasions
(xvi) *Tusharipūjā*—for unmarried girls
(xvii) *Pṛthvipujā* or *Svastika*
(xviii) *Dasapāta-aripana*
(xix) *Ṣaṣṭhipūjā-aripana*
(xx) *Chaturthi ka Aripana*
(xxi) *Kojāgra ka Aripana*—uses *Makhāna* leaf as the base.

These paintings are connected with the daily life of the people of Mithilā and are the products of the various *Saṁskāras*. The Vedic *Sarvatobhadra* or *Svastika* continues in painting down to this day and is drawn or sketched by the

women around the *Tulasi* plant in the month of *Kārtika*—directions for attractive drawings or paintings are found in the *Kṛtyaratnākara*. The art of painting in Mithilā has been preserved since time immemorial by the women folk of the Karaṇa Kāyasthas and Brāhmaṇas. Line drawings on the ground is known as *aripana*. Most of them are symbolical of tantric designs but the majority of the patterns are shapes representing natural objects like flowers, leaves, tree, fish, peacocks, snakes, sun and the moon, gods and goddesses, ploughmen, sweepers, *bhariyās* (carriers) etc. The *aripanas* express collective imagination and group function.

The *Gosāunikaghara, Kohabara, Harisaun-pūjā-ka-chitra, Sarovara-chitra* etc. are also important representatives of the Mithilā school of painting. The aim of the wall painting is to mirror the colour and variety of life and majority of them are just glimpses of life, environment and nature. Inside the *Kohabara*, the four corners are painted with figures of four women known as *Naina-yogina* carrying various articles on their heads. On one wall would be *bamboo-bush (bāṅsa)* painted complete with birds. On another would be a lotus plant with flowers capped by a human face depicting the moon. In the verandah outside *kohabara* scenes from rural life of Mithilā are profusely illustrated.

VII

Mithilā made a notable contribution towards the development of Indian culture in the field of language and literature and its script is important in the sense that it is one of the earliest known scripts of northern India.[29] Its antiquity is vouchsafed by the *Lalitavistara* which mentions the *Vaidehi* script. *Mithilākṣara* or *Tirhutā*, as it is popularly known, emerged out of an eastern variety of the Gupta script as is shown in Buhler's chart. The inscriptions of Ādityasena exhibit the first remarkable change in the development of north-eastern script. The various late Gupta, Pāla, Karṇāṭa and Oinvara inscriptions discovered from Mithilā show the typical traits of Maithili script. The

29 Chaudhary—'*Mithilā in the age of Vidyāpati*'. Cf. Rajeswar Jha—*Mithilākṣara ka Utpatti O Vikāsa*.

script has travelled beyond the Gaṅgā as is evident from the two epigraphic records discovered from Suryagarhi and Santhal Pargana. Maithili script was equally popular in Tibet and there are thousands of Tibetan manuscripts in Maithili character—and some of them are preserved in the library of the Bihar Research Society, Patna. Its tantric origin is suggested by '*Aṅgī*'— representing tantric *Kuṇḍalinī* displaying creative energy. Every letter is suggestive of some sense. The earliest source of this script is the *Kuṭila* script which, in course of time, came to be known as *Vaivarta* script, mentioned by Dharmaswāmi.

The literary tradition of Mithilā has been very old. Nānyadeva was one of the greatest patrons of art and culture and since then the tradition has continued without any break. Nānyadeva, Jayadeva, Jyotirīśvara, Umāpati, Vidyāpati, Govindadās, Amṛtakara, Lochana and various others are names to conjure with. *Supadma* grammar, a specific contribution of Mithilā in the field of *Vyākaraṇa*, is studied in the districts of Jessore and Khulna (Baṅglādeśa). Lochana has discussed the song metres of Mithilā and has given a list of ninety six *rāgas*. In modern times, Chanda Jha revived most of those metres. In modern times, the common types of Maithili poetry are :—

(i) *Tirhuti*
(ii) *Baṭagamni* (Nāyikā in Abhisāra)
(iii) *Goālari* (sports of Kṛṣṇa in the company of Gopīs)
(iv) *Rāsa* (Kṛṣṇa's sportive Līlā with Gopī)
(v) *Māna*

Other important forms of Maithili folk poetry have been mentioned earlier. The Maithili folk literature is equally important from literary point of view. It is marked by simplicity and freshness. Maithili folk literature has long romantic tales like *Lorika*, *Bihulā*, *Salhesa*, *Didābhadri*, *Naika-Banjārā*, *Satikumārī* etc. The tradition of lyric poetry set by early *charyāpadas*, elaborated and perfected by Jayadeva, Umāpati, Vidyāpati and Govindadāsa, is a priceless heritage of Indian literature. Maithili lyrics are distinguished by their melodies.

VIII

One of the important aspects of the Maithili culture is the system of the *pañjis* and no account of the cultural heritage of Mithilā can be complete without it. The *pañjis* are the most exhaustive and authoritative genealogies of the Brāhmaṇas and Karaṇa kāyasthas. The *pañjīkāras* guard them as their valuable treasures so much so that they do not allow even genuine researchers to look into it. The *pañjis* are written in a technical style of their own and can not be handled by a layman. Women donot find a place in these records encept occasionally and daughters are recorded not in the families of their births but in those of their marriages.

According to Grierson, the *pañjis* give much useful information and are one of the most extraordinary records in existence. It has been in existence from the first quarter of the fourteenth century and forms a piece of Maithili literature. So far only two scientific books on the subject are available—

(i) *Maithila Brāhmaṇo kā Pañjī Vyavasthā* by Ramānātha Jhā (in Hindi)
(ii) *Maithila Karaṇakāyastha Pañjikā Sarvekṣaṇa* by Binod Bihari Varma (in Maithili).

In Mithilā, the *pañjis* are punctiliously preserved by the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas and those who handle it are known as *pañjīkāras*. Rasbehari Das and Ghanananda Jha have also written about the *pañjis* in their own way. The *pañji* seems to have played a very prominent part in the development of early Maithili language, particularly at a time when the standard racy country words were developed. According to Grierson, it was a great achievement of the Maithilas. It could not do away with the flambuoyant impression and profusion of compounds. It preserves information about all the families. Though written in a concise manner, it is exact, logical and relevant.

The *pañjis* are factual records and have been put in a language[30] which is ordinarily free from sentimental rhetoric. The *pañjis* prohibit marriages with the girls of the following kinds—

30 Quotations from *Mithila Karaṇa Kāyastha Pañji*—Vide B. B. Varma, p. 192-93.
(i) [illegible]

(i) *Sagotra*—descended from the same sage from father's side

(ii) *Sapiṇḍa*—within the seventh direct descent either from the maternal or paternal side

(iii) in any case, related by being upto the seventh from father's side and upto the fifth from mother's side in descent

(iv) issues of grandfathers—both maternal and paternal

(v) daughter of the brother of step mother

Before marriage, the *pañjikāras* issue *aswajanpatra.*

IX

While summing up we may say that the development of Buddhism on the other side of the Ganges from the stage of *Mahāyāna* to the height of *Sahajayāna* influenced the life and condition of the people of Bihar in general and Mithilā in particular. The creed of Sahajayāna led to the emergence of social revolutionaries known as *Siddhas* who preached in the language of the people, ridiculed image worship and efficacy of religious baths and pilgrimages. This line of thinking of the *Siddhas* is represented in later times by Kabīra who also flourished on the borderline of Mithilā. Between the eighth and sixteenth centuries A.D. there was efflorescence of philosophical and speculative activity and the polemics between the Mithilā *Naiyāyikas* and the Buddhists constitute a brilliant chapter in the intellectual history of Bihar, nay of India.

(ii) बीरदाम सँ बीजी विष्णुदास ठक्कुर ए सुतो देवठक्कुर ए सुतो त्रिपुर ठक्कुर ए सुतो धर्मदास ठक्कुर ए सुतो गंगाधर ठक्कुर तत्र धर्मदेव सुत गणेश सहोदर महेश ठक्कुर सुतः ३ बाड़ ठक्कुर कुशधि ठक्कुर श्री नाथ ठक्कुर काः श्रीनाथ ठक्कुर सुतः लोकनाथ ठक्कुर तत सुतो मदुकमणि ठक्कुर साहेब ठक्कुरौ २ मदुकमणि ठक्कुर सुतो बाड़ ठक्कुर मधुसूदन ठक्कुरौ फकेसरि पाक सँ सानंद सुत हरिहर दौ रेणुका प्रसिद्धा भायो देवि पुती सुता कमलावती कुमुदिनी विद्यावती रुक्मिणी सत्यावती सौदामिनि कपूरावलिकाः ।

(iii) बीजा क डेरावली ओ शाखा

बीजर बीर मदौनावासी करहियार क्योटी

श्रीनाथ दहिमा के वासी रह अरडू विद्यनाथ रही ॥

भवनाथ रजवे डेरा किन् लखमी ककरौर गाम ।

मधुसूदन आकिलवासी बरहना श्रीराम ।

चन्द्रदास रतनपुरवासी मच्छी बस रजदेव ।

बैन्ती गंगाधर डेरा करौ गजाम बस हरिदेव

बक्तियारपुरहावासी हरि केशव कहुआपान

जगन बहादुरपुर डेरा बारायपुर श्री काम ।

The Karṇāṭa regime provided a stable social order in the form of an ingenious hierarchical system and maintenance of family genealogies. Mithilā under the Karṇāṭas witnessed enriched intellectualism with a lyrical and colourful stream of music and fine arts. The music developed on lines different from the present day Hindustani music of northern India. The impact of south Indian music on Mithilā is obvious. In the *Gorakṣavijaya* of Vidyāpati, there is a reference to a dancer from Tailangadeśa.

A wave of popular Hinduism in the form of Bhāgavata creed and Śaivism is reflected in contemporary drama, song and dance and also in the festivities, domestic rituals and folklore of the common people. Peoples' language emerged as the national language of Mithilā as early as the 12th–13th century A.D. when other language groups of north India were still groaning under the dead weight of Sanskrit. Not only that, almost parallel to the sophisticated art, pottery, textile painting and paintings on walls and grounds grew up under the influence of popular Hinduism. This was a notable development during the Oinvāra period when we find the dissemination of courtly art into the villages with the result that even after the court ceased to be powerful the cultural trends remained alive. Since the days of *Yajurveda* right upto the present the Maithilas have succeeded in maintaining their cultural identity without any break and that has been possible due partly to its geographical setting and partly to the innate conservatism of its people who are the real custodians of the cultural traits.

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